

Fire commissioners vote in low tax hikes

By HEATHER MURRAY

Fairview, Greenville and Hartsdale taxpayers will pay roughly the same for fire services next year as they did in 2009. Fire commissioners for the three districts approved their 2010 budgets Tuesday night after holding sparsely attended public hearings.

Fairview's proposed budget comes in at \$11 million, roughly \$200,000 less than the budget originally proposed by commissioners. Fairview fire Chief Robert Mauro said commissioners cut the budget after receiving a payment for "a correction of assessment of \$172,000. We plan to use the money to make some purchases this year instead of next."

The average Fairview taxpayer with a home assessed at \$18,000 would pay slightly less than \$2,332 in fire taxes, an estimate based on the tax rate before the \$200,000 budget cut.

Hartsdale's budget comes in at \$9.18 million, which is an estimated 7 percent increase over 2009, secretary/treasurer Sharon Spagnoli told the Inquirer. The average Hartsdale house-

hold with an assessed value of \$18,000 will pay roughly \$2,369 in fire taxes. The Inquirer previously reported that Fairview and Hartsdale's average assessments on residential homes are \$15,000, but the town assessor's office said Wednesday that \$18,000 is a more accurate estimate.

Greenville is proposing a 1.53 percent increase for 2010, which means that the average Edgemont household with a \$30,000 assessment will pay roughly \$2,992 in fire taxes. The proposed budget comes in at \$7.5 million.

Mauro said no one showed up to his headquarters Tuesday to comment on the budget. "I think that shows that people are satisfied with the services," he said.

The fire budgets have been scrutinized more closely in the media over the past several months due to proposals to consolidate either 10 or three local districts.

Michael Golden, chairman of the Greenville Board of Fire Commissioners, said his board believes that con-

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consolidation could raise taxes, rather than bring a cost savings to Edgemonters.

Golden said his board studied a claim made in the 10-district consolidation proposal that taxpayers could realize up to \$47 million in savings through a reduction in insurance costs. Golden said that his board found that insurance costs would not be reduced for Greenville, even if its rating improved from a 4 to a 1. "Residential rates would not go down," he said.

Although Greenville won't be appointing a representative to the Town of Greenburgh's commission exploring the consolidation of Fairview, Greenville and Hartsdale, Golden said the district would provide any information

commission members need.

One resident showed up to Greenville's hearing. Mark Rosenblatt asked commissioners to provide numbers for the actual budget-to-budget increase to taxpayers. The budget information mailed home to Edgemont residents compares the 2009 budget approved last year with the proposed 2010 budget. Greenville district treasurer/secretary Lisa Geoghegan said the district won't know the actual 2009 numbers until the end of the year, but could provide 2008 numbers.

Rosenblatt also asked for information on how much money Greenville has in its reserves and what this year's expected increase will be for retirement costs. Geoghegan said the district's un-

appropriated fund balance for next year is between \$700,000 and \$750,000, or roughly 10 percent of its 2010 budget. New York school districts are restricted to saving an amount equal to only 4 percent or less of their budget in unappropriated reserves, but there is no such limitation for local governments or special districts. Geoghegan said she has been told that 10 percent is the recommended target amount for prudent districts to save.

Greenville will be contributing \$250,000 of its fund balance to the 2010 budget to keep taxes low.

While the state employees' retirement system has been hit with an estimated 50 percent increase this year, the police and fire retirement system

will see a smaller increase at 20 percent, Geoghegan said.

Golden said a new contract with employees is under negotiation. Rosenblatt asked whether firefighters contribute to their insurance. Golden said the state plan that Greenville uses requires no employee contribution, but he believes there is a co-pay.

Chief Dan Raftery reported on a bidding schedule to purchase a new fire engine, which will likely cost around \$600,000. He is also recommending that the district purchase new heavy lifting bags and tool equipment. The bags and equipment would cost approximately \$31,700.

Greenburgh's proposed budget is expected to be released next Friday.